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PORTO RICO

AND OUR WORK THERE

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AND OUR WORK THERE.

"Down East" is no longer the term we should apply to Maine alone, for, farther east, and certainly much farther "down," lies our new possession, Porto Rico—1,400 miles south-east from New York, 1,000 miles southeast from Florida—the smallest of the Greater Antilles, one of the most beautiful of the forty islands of the West Indian Archipelago.

In 1493, when Columbus discovered the island of Borinquén, it was "as fertile as a garden and swarming like a hive," but fifty years of Spanish rule so reduced the number of Indians that when, in 1543, the King of Spain freed them from slavery the Bishop of the island reports that "the number of Indians to whom this signal mercy is granted is about sixty."

Ponce de Leon, the first Governor of the island, built his capital first at Caparra and a few months later at San Juan. Here, in 1521, he built his Casa Blanca, whose walls still stand, and here he dreamed of the fountain which would restore him to his lost youth—a dream which lured him to his death.

These early adventurers came with the idea of gaining untold wealth, and they built great forts to protect it. El Morro, with walls six feet thick, had guarded the San Juan harbor for a hundred years before the Pilgrims landed on the New England coast. The tropical richness of Porto Rico attracted the attention of other nations, and many times were the forts of the Spanish called upon to defend their title as they repelled attacks from French and Dutch, English and American, for our own Admiral Porter, cruising the Caribbean in search of the West Indian pirates, could not resist the temptation to try a passage at arms with the Spanish.

For many years Porto Rico was used by Spain as a place of political exile. In 1823, however, the country sprang into new life under a Governor whose wise laws and liberal policy induced many colonists to settle there. In 1873 slavery was abolished and the slaves were paid for by funds drawn from the general treasury. The change was effected without much loss to the island, whose interests moved slowly on in the quiet and deliberate manner characteristic of tropical countries.

The chief sources of the wealth of Porto Rico are coffee, sugar, fruit and tobacco. Its coffee is of the best quality, and the large plantations give employment to thousands of people. The best grade of coffee is always produced in the mountainous parts of tropical

countries, and, as nine-tenths of the surface of Porto Rico is mountainous, coffee growing is perhaps the largest industry there. Banana farming is very profitable, and 200,000,000 of bananas are shipped annually.

Lying but eighteen degrees north of the equator, the climate of Porto Rico is truly tropical. No frost ever touches the island, no cold wind ever blows on its shores. Summer and winter the temperature remains at nearly the same point, never very excessive, but never varied by a cool snap. The percentage of humidity is large, especially on the northern coast. Needles and steel instruments rust easily, books and shoes mildew. In this even climate woolen clothes are oppressive and the prevailing dress for men and women is of some white material, the thinner the better.

Porto Rico is a country without chimneys. As the only need for fire is for the preparation of food, charcoal stoves are better adapted to the climate than our large cook stoves would be. The cooking of the islanders is a modification of that of southern Europe—coffee and rolls for breakfast, a substantial lunch and an elaborate dinner. A use of oil and garlic more liberal than our own, causes the fastidious to make unfavorable comments, but with judicious restraint along these lines the Porto Ricans make excellent cooks. Bare floors are the rule among rich or

poor. Carpets only form a trap for the many forms of insect life which abound in a tropical country. For the same reason, and because of the greater coolness, draperies are not in great favor. Nor does the wise dweller in this hot climate use a mattress; he prefers rather a stretched canvas or a comfortable thrown over a woven-wire spring. But whatever else he may do without, he must have a mosquito net if he would sleep. So much as to physical conditions.

In 1899, the Presbyterian Church sent down the Rev. Milton E. Caldwell to establish work in Mayagüez, a city of about 20,000 inhabitants and situated on the west coast of the island. Dr. Caldwell, being a good Spanish scholar, was able to begin his work without delay. From the first his services were crowded with people to whom the Bible had always been a closed book. Very soon the destitute condition of the Playa (shipping district) called Dr. Caldwell, and he opened another place of worship there. At about the same time, believing that the hope for Porto Rico lies in educating its young, the Woman's Board started a school in Mayagüez, in which about seventy young girls and small boys are receiving a Christian education under competent teachers—Miss Ordway, Miss Weyer, Miss Monefeldt and Miss Wilson. These ladies have started another school at the Playa, and Miss Tompkins is helping them there.

At San Juan, the capital, Dr. J. Milton Greene, also a good Spanish scholar, began his work shortly after Dr. Caldwell entered Mayagüez. After a few months of work in a building hired for the purpose, Dr. Greene had the pleasure of building and dedicating the first Presbyterian church of San Juan, with full congregations at every service. La Marina, a large district of San Juan, utterly without schools or churches, either Catholic or Protestant, next appealed to Dr. Greene for help, and he started there both Sabbath services and a day-school under Miss Butterfield and Miss Potter.

In 1900, Dr. Grace Atkins was sent down to do medical work among the poor, not only in Dr. Greene's church, but wherever the need was manifest. The great usefulness of her work was shown by the fact that from the beginning of her work she has had from ten to twenty-five calls a day. She is now appealing for money to build a hospital, for the earth floors, thatched roofs and uncleanly homes of her patients often render unavailing her most earnest efforts in their behalf.

In April, 1899, the Rev. Judson Underwood began work on the west coast, in Aguadilla, the place where Columbus landed in 1493. The usual earnest crowds awaited him, and he now has a church with 150 members and has started a school under Miss Aitken and Miss Love for those children who cannot gain

entrance into the public school. Our government is doing what it can for free education in Porto Rico. At present, however, the funds are sufficient for but one-eighth of the children of the island. The others must go untaught unless the churches will come to their aid.

In 1901, the Rev. James G. Woods went to San German, and in the same summer the Rev. J. Knox Hall went to San Juan to take up the work begun by Dr. Greene, who was called to open a mission in Cuba.

Rev. H. L. Jason and Rev. J. W. Jarvis, two colored ministers, are doing a good work among their own people, the former in San Juan, the latter in Mayagüez.

Recently two additional missionaries have been commissioned for the western part of the island (for which our Church is especially responsible), Mr. Lopez as an assistant to Mr. Underwood, and the Rev. James McAllister to begin work at Isabella and out-stations.

• Thus our force on the island, after less than three years of work, comprises eight missionaries, three organized churches and a dozen out-stations, eight teachers with four schools, and a medical mission. The immediate needs are three church buildings, one at Mayagüez, one at Aguadilla and one at San German, and a hospital at San Juan.